

**THE CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES**  
**AND ITS MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM**

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## **THE CENTER**

The study of the region extending from Morocco to Kazakhstan is coordinated, encouraged, and stimulated at the University of Chicago by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES). Established in 1965, CMES has been supported for more than forty years by the Divisions of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Chicago and by grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the Mellon Foundation.

The educational aims of the Center are to assist students in acquiring: 1) firm grounding in an academic discipline or a professional field; and 2) specialist knowledge of the languages and civilizations of the Middle East. The Center, an interdepartmental, interdisciplinary unit, achieves these objectives by helping to plan degree programs for students who intend to use their knowledge of the Middle East in careers in university teaching and research, governmental and non-governmental organizations, business, journalism, and other personal or professional pursuits. Since CMES faculty members have their primary teaching appointments in the social sciences and humanities departments or in the professional schools, the work of the Center is closely linked with the programs of other degree-granting bodies of the University. The Center also brings to the University visiting scholars whose work strengthens and complements that of the regular faculty.

In addition, the Center serves as a forum for the open, responsible, and informed exchange of ideas among University of Chicago students, faculty, staff, and members of the community on all issues relating to the Middle East. In these exchanges, the Center recognizes the centrality of the principles of freedom, civility, and conscience in the presentation of ideas and opinions in all forms of communication and in all programmatic activities.

## **MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE**

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies offers an interdisciplinary Master of Arts program especially suitable for students considering an academic career yet who have not had the appropriate academic background for direct entrance into a doctoral program. It is also designed for students who wish to use their knowledge of the Middle East in careers other than university teaching and research. Students are admitted to the Master of Arts program in the Division of the Humanities. Language and area studies preparation may be supplemented by relevant course work in one or more departments or professional schools across the university—most commonly in the divisions of the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and the Divinity School. Students who enrolled through the Social Sciences Division before 2024 will receive their degree from that division.

There are three tracks for the MA program in Middle Eastern Studies: Ancient, Modern, and Human Rights. The ancient track, offered in collaboration with the faculty of the

Department of Middle Eastern Studies, focuses on the cultures and languages of the ancient Near East. The modern program covers the history, politics, and cultures of the region from the rise of Islam until the present. The human rights track, offered in collaboration with faculty at the Pozen Center for Human Rights, combines training in the history, politics, and cultures of the Middle East with theoretical and practical training in human rights work. The application process, degree requirements, and the rules and conditions for financial aid are similar for all three tracks.

### Division of Humanities

The application process for admission and financial aid for all Humanities graduate programs is administered through the divisional Office of the Dean of Students. The Application for Admission and Financial Aid, with instructions, deadlines and department specific information is available [online](#).

Questions pertaining to admissions and aid should be directed to [humanitiesadmissions@uchicago.edu](mailto:humanitiesadmissions@uchicago.edu) or (773) 702-5809.

### BA/MA

UChicago undergraduates may apply for a five-year BA/MA program that is offered in conjunction with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the College. Through this dual BA/MA program, College students can earn a BA degree and also an MA degree in Middle Eastern Studies after only five years of study at the University of Chicago.

Students admitted to the dual BA/MA program in Middle Eastern Studies are considered to be in “concurrent residence” (in the College and in CMES) beginning in the Autumn Quarter of their fourth year at the University. In other words, during their fourth year at the University of Chicago, students are simultaneously pursuing the requirements of the BA and the MA degree. Students will complete a BA thesis and will receive their BA degree at the end of year four. In the fifth year BA/MA students are no longer in concurrent residence - they complete the MA requirements including the MA thesis, and they receive a Master’s degree in Middle Eastern Studies.

## MA PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

### Ancient Track

The requirements are satisfactory completion of:

- Six quarters of the same ancient Middle Eastern language
- One quarter core colloquium: *Approaches to the Study of the Ancient Near East*
- Three survey courses in the History, Archaeology and Cultures of the Ancient Near East (see below under “Core Courses”)
- Eight courses in relevant electives
- A master’s thesis

### Modern Track

The requirements are satisfactory completion of:

- Six quarters of the same modern Middle Eastern language
- One quarter core colloquium: *Approaches to the Study of the Middle East*
- Two History courses selected from an approved list (a list will be made available at the beginning of each academic year)
- Nine courses in relevant electives
- A master’s thesis

### Human Rights Track

The requirements are satisfactory completion of:

- One quarter core colloquium: *Approaches to the Study of the Middle East*
- One quarter *International Human Rights Law and Practice*
- One quarter in human rights method (*Human Rights Fieldwork, Human Rights Ethnographic Methods*, or similar)
- Two History courses selected from an approved list (a list will be made available at the beginning of each academic year)
- One year of the same Middle Eastern language (3 courses)
- Four additional courses in human rights
- Six electives in Middle Eastern studies
- An optional quarter-long internship, ideally to be completed over the summer
- A master’s thesis or reflection on experiential internship

For all tracks, only courses taken for a quality grade count toward fulfilling the requirements. No P or R grades will be accepted. CMES students are not allowed to audit any courses. A grade in any course lower than a C will not earn credit and will thus require that the student take at their own expense a substitute course.

Elective courses may concentrate on one area or explore several of the fields of ancient or modern Middle Eastern studies through related disciplines such as Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History, Classics, History, Linguistics, Literature, Political Science, and Sociology.

Typical Two-Year Program in the Ancient Track

Year 1

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Language	Language	Language
Survey Course	Survey Course	Survey Course
Core Course	Elective	Elective

Year 2

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Language	Language	Language
Elective	Elective	Elective
Elective	Thesis Course	Elective

Typical Two-Year Program in the Modern Track

Year 1

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Language	Language	Language
History Course	History Course	Elective
Core Course	Elective	Elective

Year 2

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Language	Language	Language
Elective	Elective	Elective
Elective	Thesis Course	Elective

## Typical Two-Year Program in the Human Rights Track

### Year 1

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Approaches	History	History
International Human Rights Law and Practice	Human Rights	Human Rights Method
Language	Language	Language

### Year 2

<b>Fall</b>	<b>Winter</b>	<b>Spring</b>
Human Rights	Human Rights	Human Rights
Elective	Elective	Elective
Elective	Elective	Elective

### Language

Placement interviews will be given so that entering students may register for courses at the appropriate level of instruction. The languages offered include: Akkadian, Arabic, Armenian, Egyptian (Ancient), Hebrew (classical and modern), Hittite, Persian, Sumerian, Turkish, and Uzbek.

### Core Courses

For the modern track MA, all students are required to take the core colloquium *Approaches to the Study of the Middle East* (CMES 30001). Students must enroll in two History courses from an approved list.

For the ancient track MA, students are required to take the core colloquium *Approaches to the Study of the Ancient Near East* and must enroll in at least three survey courses in the History, Archaeology and Cultures of the Ancient Near East, covering at least three different geographic areas (Egypt and Nubia; Mesopotamia; Anatolia; the Levant; Iran; etc.). Relevant courses are listed on the website of the department of Middle Eastern Studies (<https://nelc.uchicago.edu/courses>) at the beginning of each academic year. These courses should be chosen in consultation with the Faculty Advisor for the CMES Ancient Track MA.

For the human rights track MA, students are required to take the core colloquium *Approaches to the Study of the Middle East* (CMES 30001), as well as *International Human Rights Law and Practice* and one quarter-length course in human rights method (*Human Rights Fieldwork*, *Human Rights Ethnographic*

*Methods*, or similar). Students must also enroll in two History courses chosen from an approved list.

### Master's Thesis

Students are required to submit a master's thesis focusing on a problem relevant to the student's intended career and should give evidence of the specialized disciplinary aspects of their training. For the human rights track, students have the option of writing a shorter reflection paper on their experiential human rights internship (see below).

The student's program adviser and a faculty member with special interest in the subject of the paper will guide the research and writing of the paper and judge whether it exhibits proof of competence in the field. During the writing of the paper, the student may register for a thesis preparation or reading and research course. Three lecturer-preceptors also provide support and counselling at various stages of this process. The thesis title will be listed on the student's transcript.

### Optional Human Rights Internship

Students in the Human Rights Track have the option of a quarter-long internship with a human rights organization, clinic, legal office, or NGO. Students are encouraged to work with UChicagoGRAD to help with placements. This work is ideally to be completed over the summer after the first year in the program.

## **FACULTY ADVISERS**

Incoming MA students will be advised by either Prof. Brian Muhs for the ancient track, Dr. Paul Walker for the modern track, or Prof. Alireza Doostdar for the human rights track. Each has the assistance of our lecturer-preceptors Dr. Bandy (ancient track) and Drs. Kaya and Shook (modern and human rights tracks). We expect that during the first year in the program each student will find a faculty specialist in their particular field of interest who is willing to serve as faculty adviser for the student's thesis. Interaction with that adviser may become more frequent over the second year.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

The University of Chicago has adopted the following statement on academic honesty:

It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system.

Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously. Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes "use" should be addressed to the instructor.

<https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/>

Plagiarism or other forms of cheating, including the unauthorized use of ChatGPT and similar generative AI tools to complete assignments, may result in a grade of "F" for the course and may also result in additional disciplinary measures at the discretion of the Dean of Students, up to and including expulsion from the University.

## **ACADEMIC PROBATION**

A grade lower than a C in any course ordinarily yields no credit and forces a serious interruption in the student's progress to degree. The student will be placed on probation, and a remedy will be determined by the program director, which may involve the requirement to take a substitute course. Students on probation must meet with their MA program's academic leadership to discuss the probation requirements and getting back on track.

If a student has any missing or incomplete course grades at the beginning of the second academic year, those grades will become "Unofficial Withdrawals" or UW. A UW grade confers no credit and bears no point value. Note that faculty can still post a quality grade within 8 quarters of a UW being assigned. If a UW grade is posted, the student will be placed on academic probation. Students on probation must meet with their MA program's academic leadership to discuss the probation requirements and getting back on track.

Our program will do everything possible to assist students, drawing on other university resources – UChicago Student Wellness, Writing Program, course advising and mentorship support – to help the student maintain steady progress toward degree completion. When necessary, we will also draw on available options from the Dean of Students office, including advocating a drop to part-time or Reduced Course Load (RCL) status, leave of absence information, or other measures as may be needed.

Note that the award of a higher level of financial aid for the second year depends strictly on completion of all nine courses taken in the first year with a certain GPA required. No additional aid will be granted if such grades remain outstanding or are not quality grades.



Additionally, having a UW on the transcript moving into the second year may have repercussions outside the MA program, including with the Office for International Affairs and Graduate Financial Aid.

There may be other cases where academic probation is necessary, including consistent grades that are below the academic requirement of the program, continued absences from courses, and/or failure to engage with coursework and faculty.

No permanent notice will be made on student transcripts to indicate academic probation. The probationary policy is designed to help students stay on track for MA completion. Students placed on academic probation will be informed in writing about the expectations for their return to good academic standing, including required coursework and the timeline for completion. The student will be asked to confirm, in writing, receipt of the probationary document and that they have read and fully understand the probationary terms.

Failure to satisfy the terms of academic probation will result in a recommendation to the Dean of Students that the student be administratively withdrawn from the M.A. program. After withdrawing or being withdrawn, there may be the possibility of being reinstated to the program. We encourage students to be in touch with the Dean of Students Offices in the Humanities for further information about this reinstatement process.

## **LEAVES OF ABSENCE AND REDUCED COURSE LOADS**

Leave of absences are available to students. Additional information about that process can be found [here](#).

International students must also meet registration requirements to maintain their visa eligibility. In some cases international students may request a reduced course load and/or leave of absence. International students must contact the Office of International Affairs (and the Dean of Students, if a leave of absence is involved) to receive updated visa documents before dropping below full-time registration.

## **WITHDRAWAL**

Students can elect to withdraw themselves from the University for a variety of reasons. Likewise, the University can also administratively withdraw a student due to restricted registration holds, disciplinary action, or failure to meet academic probation deadlines. Further details concerning withdrawal from the University may be found here: <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/administrative-policies/withdrawal-from-the-university>.

## **EXTENDED STATUS AND FIVE YEAR DEGREE LIMIT**

Students in Master's programs who have not graduated at the end of their final quarter of registration and who are working to finish incomplete coursework and/or the thesis may request to be registered in extended status. Extended status carries no tuition charges and confers no privileges such as registering for courses, borrowing money, deferring loans, access to health insurance or the student health and counseling services. Student in extended status are eligible to access the libraries on campus and borrowing privileges may be purchases for a quarterly fee. Students in extended status are still beholden to the University policies as it relates to registration holds and clearance of those holds. If holds are not cleared, students in extended status, can still be administratively placed on leave and/or withdrawn. Please note: Students in extended status must petition to complete their thesis and/or other degree requirements, subject to the approval of the director of the Master's program. The division will not consider petitions more than five years beyond matriculation. After the five-year limit, the student is not allowed to register for further coursework or finish any incomplete course. The withdrawal from the program becomes permanent, and the student would need to re-apply to the program. Part-time students are held to the same five-year deadline.

## **MA SERVICE REQUIREMENT**

The CMES MA program requires 24 service hours (4 hours/quarter) over the course of the degree. Service hours include all activities supporting the CMES community and academic field outside of ordinary degree requirements. Examples of service hours include but are not limited to:

- Writing news articles and event reviews for the CMES website
- Volunteering at the annual MEHAT Conference
- Participating in outreach programs to K-12 schools and community colleges
- Presenting research at academic conferences
- Assisting at CMES events

If you have any questions about qualifying activities for the service hour requirement, please contact the CMES staff.

## **ACADEMIC RESOURCES**

### Language Circles

CMES supports regular language circles in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian and Turkish. Check each circle's webpage for information about weekly presenters, discussion topics, and meeting times during the fall, winter, and spring quarters.

<https://cmes.uchicago.edu/activities-and-events/language-circles>

Informal conversation practice groups also meet for Arabic, Persian (Sofreh), and Turkish (Sohbet).

### Library Resources

The Middle Eastern Collection at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library is one of the premier resources for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in the world. The collection has a long and auspicious history dating back to the establishment of the University itself. The collection contains materials in all the principal languages of the region including Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew, as well as virtually all scholarship originating in the former Soviet Union, North America, and Europe. It is dedicated to supporting the studies of graduate students, undergraduates, faculty, and the international academic community, and in its breadth embraces all disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences.

- [Middle Eastern Department - Regenstein Library](#)
- [Middle East Photograph Archive - Regenstein Library](#)

### Workshops

The University sponsors a rich variety of workshops and study groups across campus. Depending on their concentration and areas of interest, students may wish to connect with the [Council on Advanced Studies](#) which funds and supports many workshops around specific topics or areas of study. These include the Middle East History and Theory Workshop ([MEHAT](#)), which holds an annual conference in the spring.

## **FUNDING AND AID**

Incoming MA students may be eligible for a limited number of divisional financial awards with specific details provided in their admission letters. For the second year all students with a GPA of 3.5 or above may be eligible to receive additional funding, many at the full tuition level. Second year students can also apply for Foreign Language and Areas Studies (FLAS) awards, which adds a stipend.

Other funding opportunities for students can be found on the [Student Grants and Fellowships](#) page.

You may also consider funding opportunities offered through [Graduate Council](#).

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

CMES is committed to providing professional development support to its MA students. Our alumni work across the world in government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations, among other industries. Please check [the website](#) for resources, events, and other opportunities.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Campus Tours: <https://grad.uchicago.edu/admissions/visit-connect/>

UChicagoGRAD: <https://grad.uchicago.edu/>

Office of International Affairs: <https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/>

Student Health and Wellness: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/>

Office of the University Bursar: <https://bursar.uchicago.edu/en>

Registrar: <https://registrar.uchicago.edu/>

myUChicago: <https://portal.uchicago.edu/ais/>

ID and Privileges: <https://ipo.uchicago.edu/>

Student Disability Services: <https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/>

Center for Identity and Inclusion: <https://inclusion.uchicago.edu/>